

## Performance Practice Review

---

Volume 19 | Number 1

Article 2

---

# "The Rameau Compendium" by Graham Sadler

Mary Cyr  
*University of Guelph*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr>



Part of the [Musicology Commons](#), [Music Performance Commons](#), and the [Music Practice Commons](#)

---

Cyr, Mary (2014) ""The Rameau Compendium" by Graham Sadler," *Performance Practice Review*: Vol. 19: No. 1, Article 2. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.201419.01.02

Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol19/iss1/2>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Claremont at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Performance Practice Review by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

## **Book Review: Sadler, Graham. *The Rameau Compendium*. Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-84383-905-1.**

**Mary Cyr**

---

Composers' anniversaries provide forums for valuable exchanges between scholars and performers, which in turn foster new research and performances. The 300th anniversary of Rameau's birth, celebrated in 1983, generated considerable interest in Rameau's music, resulting in a new scholarly edition as well as numerous publications, staged performances, and recordings. In subsequent years, a great deal of new research continued on the sources, iconography, and performance practice of his works. This year—the 250th anniversary of his death in 1764—Rameau's contributions are once again being recognized with special events, especially conferences and concerts. At least two books on Rameau have also appeared this year: Sylvie Bouissou's biography and Graham Sadler's *Rameau Compendium*.<sup>1</sup> Both publications are important contributions to the literature on Rameau and eighteenth-century French music in general.

Graham Sadler has been a leading figure in Rameau research since the 1980s. He has edited two operas for the new complete works edition (*Opera Omnia de Rameau* or *OOR*, under the direction of Sylvie Bouissou), and his research findings have contributed to a new understanding of French conventions with regard to the *basse continue* and the performance of French cantatas. He possesses a comprehensive knowledge of the sources and is able to draw connections between Rameau's practices in vocal and instrumental writing, as well as between the theoretical and musical sides of Rameau's *oeuvre*. Sadler's own experience as a keyboard player infuses his work with practical observations that allow it to appeal to a broad group of players, scholars, and listeners.

The Boydell series of Composer Compendiums began in 2011 with Michael Talbot's *Vivaldi Compendium*. The objective of the series is to provide a reference work on major composers that will give "instant information and act as a gateway to further reading" (front matter). Its intended audience is scholars, performers, and listeners who are seeking more information about specific composers and their works. Sadler's volume is the second in the series, for which Talbot now serves as general editor. Both of these authors have a strong interest in performance practice that is readily apparent in each of

---

1. Sylvie Bouissou, *Jean-Philippe Rameau, Musicien des Lumières* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).



their volumes. One hopes that this feature will continue to be a mainstay of the series in the future.

The *Rameau Compendium* is comprised of four sections: a biography of the composer; a dictionary with entries for people, places, and a variety of terms and concepts associated with the composer and his music; a work list; and a bibliography. At only thirteen pages in length, the biography is the briefest of the four sections, but it nevertheless contains a wealth of new information derived from archival sources that sheds light on Rameau's early years and on various members of his family. It also helps to tie together some of the disparate entries in the dictionary and makes for fascinating reading. For example, we learn more about the flamboyant personality of Jean-Philippe's younger brother, Claude Bernard (1689–1761), whose keyboard playing was said to have been the equal of his older brother's. Also of interest is Marie-Claude Rameau (1681–1762), one of Jean-Philippe's seven older sisters, who was known as a harpsichordist and music teacher in Dijon. And there is Rameau's father, Jean (1638–1714), who was an organist. His musical instruments, which were dispersed among his children when he died, included "a large two-manual harpsichord decorated in the Chinese style" (p. 174), several other keyboard instruments, and a *dessus de viole*. As woven together by Sadler, new facts about Rameau and his relationship with other musicians and with opera management show him to be a man of principle who spoke his mind but not necessarily the irascible and temperamental individual that is sometimes portrayed. Sadler also manages to intertwine Rameau's interest in theoretical writing with the composition and performance of his operas, something that is rarely achieved in other biographical accounts of Rameau.

For readers whose special interest is performance practice, the central part of this work—a dictionary of terms, people, and places—will be a particularly useful resource. By far the largest of the four sections, the dictionary comprises nearly seventy-five percent of the book's 285 pages. At the end of each entry, cross-references to other pertinent entries and to books and articles in the bibliography offer readers an opportunity to explore specific issues in greater detail. The most outstanding features of the dictionary are the breadth of the entries and the inclusion of Sadler's own observations based on his extensive study of the sources. There are entries for many French terms, including some relatively mysterious ones such as *mesuré* and *louré*, as well as more general information on the way that Rameau used certain instruments. For example, Sadler explains how and when Rameau used horns in his orchestra, and the meaning of the unusual term *cors seul* in Rameau's autograph manuscripts. For the entry on the *haute-contre* voice, he supplements previous findings about its use as a solo voice with his own observations on the *haute-contre* part in the opera choruses. New information about expressive markings in the manuscript sources, such as "*saisir*," will also be especially pertinent for singers.

Many entries in the dictionary are biographical in nature, either people whom Rameau knew, or individuals who contributed to the dissemination of his music. In addition to people from Rameau's own circle, there are entries for Handel, Vivaldi, and

Telemann, each of whom had a part in the spread of Rameau's reputation and influence internationally. Readers who wish to pursue further research on Rameau will wish to take note of the dictionary entry for the "Borée database," a site administered by Pascal Denécheau that includes links to editions, sources, libraries, publishers, authors, articles, and books. Among its important contributions is an impressive "*liste des thèmes*" for Rameau research that includes subsections on copyists, a discography, staging, orchestra and instruments, and many others. The French body that initiated this important site recently underwent a name change and is now known as the Institut de Recherche en Musicologie ("L'IReMus"). Readers of the *Rameau Compendium* will need to update the URL that is given for the Borée database, which is now <http://iremus.humanum.fr/boree/>.

At the end of each dictionary entry, there are several abbreviated references to books and articles in the extended bibliography at the end of the compendium. Most dictionary entries have at least one to three such references, and many have six or more. Perhaps in order to save space, these abbreviated references are indicated by means of six-letter *sigla* rather than in a more recognizable manner, such as the author's last name and year of publication. Each *siglum* is formed from a combination of the first three letters of the author's name and three letters from a prominent word in the title. For example, James R. Anthony's *French Baroque Music* is indicated by the *siglum* *AntFre*. One of the disadvantages of this system is that it is impossible to tell from the *sigla* which publications were most recently published. In addition, occasionally two or more authors whose names begin in the same way have *sigla* that suggest that they are one person. For example, it is impracticable to determine solely from the *sigla* *BouAix*, *BouHer*, and *BouThé* that they represent publications by three different authors: André Bourde, Sylvie Bouissou, and Thierry-G. Boucher. A more serious issue with the *sigla* is that some of them appear to have no corresponding entry in the bibliography at all. In my attempt to follow the *sigla* in selected dictionary entries, I noted at least a dozen for which no corresponding citation could be found. These are *CamCom*, *ChrEig*, *CohAca*, *DahTra*, *LesCom*, *MorBou*, *MorHer*, *NoiCas*, *PorPri*, *SaiDic*, *SchLet*, and *TalViv*. Whether these lapses arise from typographical errors or indicate that some items were inadvertently dropped from the bibliography is difficult to say. The system of indicating works by *sigla* is a feature of the series as a whole, but difficulties such as those described above suggest that reverting to a simpler system such as author and date might be more practical for users.

The sixteen-page work list at the end of the compendium follows the general organization of the *Grove Music Online* work list (also compiled by Sadler), with a few differences. For the operas, there is more information in the Grove list, such as the locations of copies of printed and manuscript sources, dates of performances and revivals for each work, and information about the composer's revisions. The briefer work list in the *Rameau Compendium* gives only the first production and first publication of each opera. Where the compendium's work list is especially comprehensive is in the separate lists of Rameau's canons, airs for one or more voices, incidental music for plays, and

cantatas. In the Grove list, these genres are covered very briefly, all together, in a section entitled "Other secular vocal [music]." The information provided in the *Rameau Compendium* about each of these compositions includes the author of the text, first printed source, comments on dubious attributions, and scoring. The sections on keyboard music, motets, and theoretical works are also extremely informative.

The *Rameau Compendium* reports on a considerable amount of new research as compared to the older Garland bibliography, but the annotations for each entry in the Garland work still remain useful for items published prior to that date.<sup>2</sup> The other comparable work is *Rameau de A à Z*, a dictionary edited by Philippe Beaussant.<sup>3</sup> It is laid out in a similar way to the *Rameau Compendium*, but *Rameau de A à Z* is more introductory in nature and not specifically intended as a research tool.

The *Rameau Compendium* treats all aspects of Rameau's career and musical accomplishments in an authoritative and comprehensive way and presents the information in an easy-to-use form that is sure to be of use to a wide audience of interested readers.

---

2. Donald H. Foster, ed., *Jean-Philippe Rameau, A Guide to Research* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1989).

3. Philippe Beaussant, ed., *Rameau de A à Z* (Paris: Fayard, 1983).